Boyhood - A series of Mono Casts and Preparatory Drawings.
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Forward

Throughout his career, British artist Clifford Rainey's work has been characterized by a combination of wit, beauty and a profound mastery of materials and technique. For nearly three decades, his explorations of the figure— both in drawings and sculpture— have continued to be inventive and surprising.

Glass is a difficult material to master. Part of what is so extraordinary about Rainey's graceful forms is that they make his use of glass seem straightforward and simple, if not inevitable. In the body of work that is the subject of this exhibition, his subject is the torso of a young boy of nine or ten. Truncated arms raised, this youth's body turns subtly in one direction while his legs shift in another, creating a fluid but dynamic movement.

This series of "Boys" both reflects on a bygone era of innocence (only half a century ago) and casts a yearning glance backwards at the idealism of boyhood: the dreams children have of quelling their dreams, changing the world and achieving greatness. As much as the content of these pieces is autobiographical, it is also metaphorical in its intent to address issues Rainey has long found compelling. These include the bitter sadness of war, particularly conflict that comes out of religious difference; the artist's concern for the environment and our role in its degradation, and magical importance of education.

The series begins with a plaster cast of the original torso Rainey modeled, using his godson as a model. Like all the Boys, it stands on a plinth made of maple. this simple box is intended to function as an extension of the sculpture mounted on its top, and has been modified differently in each work to indicate its integral role. Once upon it, each boy stands at his natural height, making explicit our relationship with him as a figure "modeled from life." This plaster torso is solid, in contrast with all the glass ones which follow. This is important because the empty space within each of the other Boys plays a vital role in the construction of their meaning. Like us, they are vessels, and the revelation of their contents through their translucent walls is the center of our understanding of the artist's intent.

Philosophy Boy has the gravitas of the sculpture of the ancient Greeks and Romans. His pristine form is a glowing white, save a greenish area in his gut. This mysterious inclusion remains a mystery until viewed from above, through the passageway provided by the open throat. Looking down, we see a shattered ceramic apple, reassembled and mended with wrapped and twisted wire. This potent symbol suggests the danger of knowledge, certainly—as Eve learned in the Garden of Eden—but is meant to suggest that other acts may have their own unfortunate consequences, including blind obedience to

the letter of law. For Rainey, fundamentalism's intolerance of any belief system contrary to its own suggests rejection of humanist values. The apple implies that within us, we each hold a shattered core of lost innocence.

Other works here reflect different aspects of how and what we learn. Shy Boy's heart is a gleaming golden wine bottle, suggesting a kind of worldly knowledge. In his youth, Rainey was deeply shy, to the point of having difficulty speaking. Alcohol, he reminds us, can encourage conviviality and break down inhibitions, allowing words to flow freely. Like the apple, however, its consumption can lead to both good and bad consequences. Literate Boy solemnly celebrates the act of reading as the foundation of learning: he is (literally) covered with text. The letters on his skin were cast in glass from lead type, a mound of which can be seen inside the torso. On the drawing Rainey made for the piece, just above the title, another name has been written: Aldus Manutius the Elder. This Italian Painter, who produced the first printed editions of many of the Greek and Latin classics, is a figure much admired by Rainey.

War Boy, tinted an unsettling yellowish hue, is the embodiment of aggression emerging from the unconscious. Shells strain to make their exit from a torso split from the top to bottom. The ammunition is held back by the twists of the wire that hold the halves together. Broken Boy shows what the consequences can be of the shell's percussive release. The same black wires stitch up his shattered form, but he will never be "as good as new." The Ghost Boys remind us that the anger and hatred that the dying take to their gave is what remains with us as their legacy— not the potential each one of them had for raising children, building houses, or resolving issues through other, means.

Born in 1984 in Northern Ireland in the near aftermath of the Second World War, Rainey was brought up to believe that there was such a thing as fighting for a just cause; that war itself, as demonstrated by Britain's salvation, is honorable. His beliefs have been changed by both the battles he experienced at home— he was raised in Belfast at the time of the Troubles—and the chain of conflicts that connect his childhood years to the present. Korea, Viet Nam, Yugoslavia and Iraq—to name only a few— altered his sense of what war could accomplish, and the cost it exacted on those least able to pay the price. War Boy embodies his conviction that peace has come through negotiation, not violence, to be lasting and meaningful.

Some of these Boys are reminders that there are things we know, but, or one reason or another, aren't able to act upon them. We have learned, for instance, that there are things we can do to save the planet, but we still don't fully grasp how rapidly the destruction is advancing. As Rainey puts it, " We have good intentions, but the carry—through isn't there." Nature Boy—whose center is a simple lava rock—is engraved with the names of 250 endangered plant and animal species. Rainey's surface treatment gives these words a rusted, weathered appearance. Gaia's Boy, tinted a celestial blue, makes reference to Celtic mythology. The branches that pierce his figure are from an oak, a tree sacred to the Celts, the ancient people who inhabited the British Isles first. Oaks live many human lifetimes—something past cultures were far more aware of than we are

today.

Art Boy bristles with colored pencils and text. The word “DRAWING” is tattooed into his skin, many times over—a sly joke, since the piece’s subtitle is a figure drawing. For Rainey, trained in the traditional way with an emphasis on drawing as a foundation, teaching in a modern art school— where such a course of study is no longer considered important—has brought its share of frustrations.

But maybe leaving the classical past behind is part of making changes in life. In the future, Rainey is thinking about moving ahead, into new and different work. This series can be seen as both the end of something—and a new beginning. After all, the Boys are not pictured standing still, but in motion: on their way towards a future which, despite the way things look now, could still turn out to have a happy ending.